



London to Brighton

A case study in British low-budget film

BBFC Rating: 18 [UK] R [US] Genre: Crime-Drama Theatrical Release: 2006

Producer(s):	Paul Andrew Williams, Alastair Clark, Ken Marshall, Rachel Robey,
Director:	Paul Andrew Williams
Writer:	Paul Andrew Williams
Editor:	Tom Hemmings
Cast:	Lorraine Stanley, Georgia Groome, Johnny Harris
Locations:	London, Brighton
Running time:	85 minutes
Production company:	Steel Mill Pictures and Wellington Films
Format:	16mm (mostly hand-held)

Description:

Neither a genre film nor gangster movie, this gritty crime drama is about a 12-year-old runaway girl named Joanne, who is lured by a prostitute, Kelly, into having sex with a violent mobster. The mobster also happens to be an elderly paedophile and after the mobster is killed, the gangster's son forces Kelly's pimp to find the girls. The film follows the girls as they escape London in the wake of what has happened.

Overview:

In some ways *London to Brighton* is a typical product of modern low-budget British filmmaking, a cross-genre piece made on a shoestring budget with mainly unknown actors. What distinguishes it from the majority of its peers is that it is a well-crafted movie that has gone on to provide a showcase for all those involved, in particular it's writer, producer and director Paul Andrew Williams. A tight script, solid acting, an engaging score and judicious editing by Tom Hemmings (*Adulthood*) are all facets of this professional, yet uncomfortably disturbing film.

Although the initial production budget was obtained with venture capital backing, like most low-budget British films *London to Brighton* was created "on spec" and any commercial objectives for this picture were clearly secondary. The main focus for the film's producers was to bring the creative vision of its director to fruition, which they

partially achieved by the early part of 2006. However, due in part to the use of 16mm as the recording format and the inevitable complications that result from a limited budget; the first capital investment was exhausted before the negative was technically suitable for distribution. Consequently with only a rough-cut and score completed, the producers turned to the UK Film Council.

In June 2006 the UK Film Council awarded Steel Mill Pictures a significant cash injection to complete postproduction. Now with the movie finished and the UK Film Council's full support assured, a domestic distribution deal was obtained with Vertigo Films and a targeted festival campaign was started. By December 2006 the film had already screened in five major festivals and won a number of prestigious awards. In the meantime, Vertigo took advantage of the free publicity the critical acclaim the festivals provided and started a limited theatrical release with a £40,000 P&A grant from the UK Film Council. Both the distributor and the UK Film Council considered this campaign a "success" after the film achieved a box office ranking of 18, which equated to US\$348,245 in total revenue, and playing in 19 theatres across five cities.

In the years since, the film has gone on to be distributed in six other territories and obtaining a DVD release in the UK, US, Canada and the Nordic countries. Total world-wide box office is close to half a million dollars, which is roughly equivalent with its final production costs (including marketing). Together with UK broadcasting rights it is possible the film has "broken even" for its investors, but more likely the UK Film Council is the only "investor" that has achieved any return.

From a "cultural" perspective, the film has achieved a level of notoriety from the non-UK festivals and foreign theatrical releases it achieved. Furthermore the film provided the British cinemagoer a British movie alternative for nine weeks and the later success of the director, editor, composer and lead actor is a testament to the film's contribution to British filmmaking talent.

There is little doubt that *London to Brighton* did achieve its full commercial potential. The difficult subject matter of its narrative and lack of known cast would have always prevented a wide theatrical release, even in its "home" market. What is also clear is that without the financial investment and marketing support from the UK Film Council the film would have not had the opportunity to be made theatrical ready, nor in all likelihood obtained a domestic distribution.

History:

Paul Andrew Williams, the director of *London to Brighton*, began his film career as an actor trying to play bit parts in various television programmes, but eventually moved into writing and directing short films. In 2001 he wrote and directed the short film *Royalty* that would later form some of the creative inspiration for *London to Brighton*. *Royalty* premiered at the London Film Festival in 2001, played on UK television and consequently screened at BAFTA. While on the dole and trying to develop another £2.5 million feature, Williams decided to attempt a longer version of *Royalty*-type low-budget film that would be easier to finance. While on a weekend trip to Devon to see his parents, he spent the time writing the script *London to Brighton*, and aside from a few scenes that needed to be "switched around" for the non-linear flashbacks the script was basically complete.

Despite the incredibly short 72-hour period for story development, the script was a quality thriller set in London's murky underworld and in an out-of-season Brighton. While the script evoked British classics of old, especially *Mona Lisa* and *Get Carter*, it had a voice distinctly its own. The "art house-like" subject matter of pedophilia, underage prostitution, drugs and torture was never considered commercially oriented, and even Williams would later say how surprised he was that the film became one of the most celebrated British films of 2006.

With the script complete Williams turned to Tony Bolton, who had funded some of his shorts and would later become the film's executive producer. Bolton responded positively to William's proposal to take a 50% ownership in the production company in return for providing the £80,000 venture capital needed to make the movie, and after a four-month pre-production period, principle photography was started.

During the shoot numerous creative compromises had to be made in order to maximise the budget. Williams did manage to shoot the picture on film rather than digital tape using a hand-held 16mm camera, but had to defer his own fee in order to do so. As a result, Williams claimed unemployment benefit throughout the entire production and every possible cost cutting measure in the shoot had to be made. A typical example of this was how the homes of investors and people working on the film were routinely used. On many occasions the crew would literally turn up on the day without knowing where they would be shooting. The production schedule was also grueling and included days where there were four hours of travel and 18 hours of shooting.

After the production was in a "rough cut" state and the score completed, the producers finally exhausted the production budget. A new investor had to be found urgently to provide the necessary completion funds, so they decided to approach the UK Film Council. Paul Trijbits, head of the council's New Cinema Fund, was supportive and in June 2006 their production company, Steel Mill Pictures, was awarded £184,566 to complete postproduction. With the movie finished and the UK Film Council's full support assured, a domestic distribution deal was quickly secured with Vertigo Films and a targeted festival campaign was started. First in this rollout was the Edinburgh International Film Festival, followed in quick succession by the Toronto International Film Festival, the London International Film Festival, the Raindance Film Festival and the Dinard Festival of British Cinema. By December 2006 the film had already won a number of prestigious awards and received a considerable amount of critical acclaim. In the meantime Vertigo took advantage of the free publicity the festivals were generating and, with the help of a further £40,000 P&A grant from the UK Film Council, started a limited theatrical release in 19 theatres across five cities. Both the distributor and the Film Council considered this campaign a "success" after the film achieved a box office ranking of 18 and generated US\$348,245 in total revenue.

Williams would later reflect that the reception from the Edinburgh festival was key and would be the impetus for the agent discussions that took place at the Toronto festival and the subsequent UK theatrical rollout.

The success of *London to Brighton* provided many in the British cast and crew the chance to begin their professional career. Williams in particular has built on his experience from the film. After coming off the dole, he has gone on to make larger

budgeted films, *The Cottage* for one, and many of his crew have followed him or gone on to bigger projects with other directors. One notable example is how Georgia Groome's outstanding performance as the 12-year-old lead helped propel her into a full-time acting career that has included playing the lead in Gurinder Chadha's *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging*.

Funding:

Originally an £80,000 total budget was planned, but this turned out to only cover the filming, first edit and scoring. Eventually the UK Film Council came in with an additional investment of £184,566 to finish the legal requirements and get the film to in a technical state ready for distribution. Therefore in order to get it to the screen it cost £260,000, not the £80,000 as widely reported at the time in the press. The overall budget was as follows:

Development:	0	
Production:	80,000	(Venture Capital – filming, rough cut and score only)
Post-production:	184,566	(UKFC: New Cinema Fund on 13/06/06 – legal, post)
Deferred fees:	N/A	(Not known the breakdown)
Total budget:	264,566	

+Festival Support:	3,950	(European Film Promotion Grand - €5,000)
+Marketing:	40,000	(UKFC – P&A Fund, Vertigo Films, 22/10/06)

Reviews:

The critical response was generally positive from critics with review aggregator *Rotten Tomatoes* reporting a 71% for positive reviews based on 24 independent observations.¹ These included:

“A gritty British gangster film that leaves a bitter aftertaste, Paul Andrew Williams’ London to Brighton is as technically assured as it is ultimately superfluous.”
Hollywood Reporter [US]

“Get Carter for the 21st Century.”
The Times [UK]

“With plenty of chutzpah, the young British film-maker Paul Andrew Williams has written and directed a cracking debut feature with enough clout to kick the door in.”
The Guardian [UK]

“The films is a calling card for its sure-handed rookie director, Paul Andrew Williams, who expertly turns up the suspense knob while establishing a thick sense of doom amid grimy settings.”
The New York Post [US]

The denouement is both surprising and morally complex.
The Observer [UK]

British urban crime movie that is several cuts about the rest.
Empire Magazine [UK]

Marketing and distribution:

The sequence of events suggests Vertigo Films may have been approached before the festival circuit, perhaps as early as the application process to the UK Film Council for completion funds. The speed to which a distribution agreement was made and the commencement of theatrical screenings is also surprising and again suggest heavy involvement from the UK Film Council. There is mention that the newly formed national digital cinema network had a part in the distribution, but this has yet to be confirmed. What is clear is that Vertigo Films received a £40,000 cash contribution to boost advertising spend and increase the number of prints. This was undoubtedly a major factor in increasing the opportunities for a wider domestic audience.² Not unexpectedly, Williams provides a different explanation for choosing Vertigo when he said “I always knew they were great at marketing films and they were very, very, proactive about getting the film, they were very passionate about it and that was what clinched it for them, all the passion they could put behind it.”³

After Toronto, Outsider Films was secured for the North America release. No public information is available about Outsider Films or the distributor for the other European territories. Outsider Films apparently went bankrupt in 2008.

UK Distributor: Vertigo Films
 US Distributor: Outside Films p&a spend: n/a
 UK DVD Distributor: Momentum Pictures

Revenues:

In order to maximise the use of a limited number of prints, Vertigo Films employed a “rolling print” strategy. This approach is where a small number of prints play in one city until the screening opportunity in that location ceases, then the distributors transfer those same prints to another city until the exhibitors there stop showing the film, and so on. In this way Vertigo Films maximised the limited P&A budget for *London to Brighton* and kept the film in the British box office charts for a longer period of time. This is not an unusual approach and is consistent with the exhibition strategy many small distributors take with British low-budget features. The final result here is that Vertigo Films was able to keep the movie in the UK box office charts for a very respectable nine weeks. At one point, the film was playing at 19 theatres and achieved a box office ranking of 18 totalling US\$348,245 in revenue.

Weekly UK Box Office Tracking⁴
London to Brighton

Weekend	Dec 1-3 (Week 1)	Dec 8-10 (Week 2)	Dec 15-17 (Week 3)	Dec 29-1 (Week 4)	Jan 5-7 (Week 5)	Jan 12-14 (Week 6)	Jan 19-21 (Week 7)	Jan 26-28 (Week 8)	Feb 2-4 (Week 9)
UK Box Office Rank	18	18	25	35	29	38	38	42	43
# of Theaters	15	19	13	1	5	4	6	6	15
Avg. per Theater (US\$)	3,849	2,847	1,639	6,123	3,562	2,302	1,056	987	400
Gross to Date (US\$)	57,740	152,652	218,821	260,076	277,043	303,367	326,239	339,152	348,245

Outside the UK, worldwide distribution was more disappointing. The figures below are for illustrative purposes only and are translated at the appropriate release year’s dollar rate and rounded up.⁵

<u>Distribution Territory Totals</u>	<u>Release Date</u>	<u>Total B.O. Gross</u>	<u>As of</u>
<i>United States</i>	08/02/08	6,700	15/02/08
<i>Belgium and Luxembourg</i>	04/07/07	45,905	19/08/07
<i>France, Algeria, Monaco, Morocco & Tunisia</i>	20/06/07	43,151	24/06/07
<i>Greece</i>	26/06/08	1,771	29/06/08
<i>Netherlands</i>	02/08/07	2,088	05/08/07
<i>Sweden</i>	13/04/07	1,821	15/04/07
<i>United Kingdom, Ireland and Malta</i>	01/12/06	348,245	04/02/07
<u>TOTAL BOX OFFICE (US\$)</u>		<u>449,681</u>	

DVD revenue: unknown
Internet revenue: unknown
Terrestrial broadcast revenue: unknown

Awards:

The film won a number of prestigious awards including: a British Independent Film Award for Best Achievement in Production. Paul Andrew Williams won the Golden Hitchcock award at the Dinard Festival of British Cinema, the New Director's Award at the Edinburgh International Film Festival, Most promising newcomer – Evening Standard British Film Awards, Best Feature Film at the Foyle Film Festival, and a Jury Prize at the Raindance Film Festival.⁶

Producer's remarks:

“Well, we just made it because we wanted to make it. That was the only impetus for us.”

“To be honest, I know I’m where I am through hard work and tenacity, and never giving up. But (the success) freaked me out a lot. I still am a bit humbled by it. I find it a bit uncomfortable.”

“There (the Edinburgh Film Festival) we started to realise that people liked the film.”

Commentary and Conclusions:

Together with UK broadcasting rights it is possible the film “broken even” for its investors, but a more likely scenario is that the Film Council was the only “investor” that achieved a return. It is also doubtful that the film would have had the opportunity to be made “theatrical ready”, nor obtained a domestic distribution, if the UK Film Council had not provided the necessary funding and support.

From a British Cinema perspective, the film did achieve a level of notoriety from the non-UK festival screenings and foreign theatrical releases it obtained. The follow on success of the director, editor, composer and lead actor also indicate a contribution to British filmmaking talent.

References and Websites:

- ¹ London to Brighton Movie Reviews, Pictures - Rotten Tomatoes. Available at: http://uk.rottentomatoes.com/m/london_to_brighton/ [Accessed October 7, 2009].
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- ³ Williams, P.A., 2006. Shooting People: Interview with Paul Andrew Williams. Available at: http://shootingpeople.org/shooterfilms/interview.php?int_id=76 [Accessed October 11, 2009].
- ⁴ United Kingdom Weekend Box Office Index for 2006. Available at: <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/uk/?yr=2006¤cy=us&p=.htm> [Accessed October 10, 2009].
- ⁵ London to Brighton (2008) - Box Office Mojo. Available at: <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=londontobrighton.htm> [Accessed October 7, 2009].
- ⁶ LONDON TO BRIGHTON :: OFFICIAL SITE. Available at: <http://www.l2b-themovie.co.uk/> [Accessed October 7, 2009].